



Office of the Chief of Police
304 Albemarle Drive
Chesapeake VA 23322



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
Officer Kelly O'Sullivan
(757) 240-0519

CHIEF'S STATEMENT

CHESAPEAKE, VA – FEBRUARY 15, 2012

Before I begin, I would like to take this time to formally thank Colonel Steve Flaherty, Superintendent of the Virginia State Police, and 1st Sergeant Mike Berry for the assistance provided by their law enforcement agency. From the moment I called Colonel Flaherty requesting aid and throughout this investigation, their assistance has been of great value as we seek to fully understand the sequence of events that took place on December 20, 2011, when we suffered the tragic loss of Officer Timothy Schock in a dive training exercise.

Clearly, this is an incident of high public interest and we want to provide as much information as we can. I will take questions after I have completed my prepared statement. However, there are details that I am not going to provide out of respect for Officer Schock's family. Furthermore, the release of information contained in the report provided by the Virginia State Police is prohibited by law.

In pursuit of the cause or causes of this awful tragedy, the Police Department launched an investigation using detectives from both our Investigative and Support Bureaus. It is my belief that we owe it to Tim, his family, and his fellow officers to complete a comprehensive and exhaustive investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death so as to identify any practice, policies, equipment, etc., that contributed to this unfortunate situation.

To the members of our police family, the community, and the media, my comments up to this point have been minimal, and I thank you for your patience. I felt it was unwise to comment on the case until we had a thorough, complete, and factual accounting as to what took place.

Both the Virginia State Police and the Chesapeake Police Department conducted numerous interviews of all the parties involved in this incident. All of the equipment was rigorously tested for functionality and reliability. Air samples in the tanks were examined for quality as well.

The following is a summary of what took place:

On December 20, 2011, Officer Timothy Schock, a 16-year police veteran and six-year member of the Chesapeake Police Underwater Search and Recovery Team (USART) was participating in a regularly scheduled, monthly training exercise at Oak Grove Lake Park, located at 409 Byron Street in the City of Chesapeake. Prior to beginning his dive, Officer Schock noticed a button had fallen off his power inflator, a device used to either inflate or deflate his buoyancy compensator. Inflation or deflation of the vest allows the diver to rise out of or lower himself into the water. A weight system is worn to help submerge the diver. After a discussion with a diver on the shore, it was determined that the button in question was the one used to deflate the buoyancy compensator, and since the vest in question had an alternate, manual method of inflation and deflation, Officer Schock decided to continue with the training exercise.

Officer Schock and his partner submerged to begin their dive at 11:30 a.m. While navigating to the first of three buoys on their preplanned course, Officer Schock and his partner realized they had missed their mark and decided to resurface at a location which was past the midpoint of the lake. At that point, they had been underwater for approximately 17 minutes without incident. Officer Schock and his partner discussed correcting their course, re-oriented themselves to the marker buoy, and decided to resume their dive. By all accounts, everything appeared to be normal at that time.

As the divers re-submerged, Officer Schock's partner reached the bottom first and noticed Officer Schock struggling to ascend. He observed that the bladder of Officer Schock's buoyancy compensator appeared to be empty. Officer Schock's partner immediately went to his assistance by inflating his own vest and using its buoyancy to lift them both to the surface. Once on the surface, Officer Schock immediately removed his full-face mask and told his partner that he was out of air. Officer Schock held onto his partner for buoyancy.

After safely ascending and alerting the personnel on the shore that they were in distress, Officer Schock's partner tried unsuccessfully to manually inflate the buoyancy compensator, which would not hold air. His partner offered his breathing apparatus to Officer Schock, who took one breath and then pushed it away. Officer Schock's partner told him to release his weights, which are contained in a belt around a diver's waist. Officer Schock responded, "I can't." Officer Schock and his partner were unable to work through the malfunction and the decision was made to head to the closest shoreline.

As they were making their way to shore, they were face up in the water with Officer Schock hanging onto his partner's neck and scuba tank, kicking their way to shore. Seeing all that was taking place, Officer Schock's teammates immediately mobilized and drove around the lake to get into a better position to help them. As they were kicking to shore, Officer Schock's partner asked him if they were headed in the right direction and Officer Schock responded yes. As they

were kicking towards the shore, the dive team members on the shore observed both Officer Schock and his partner's heads out of the water.

As they were making their way to shore, Officer Schock made several position adjustments on his partner, moving higher up on his scuba tank and neck. Officer Schock's partner informed him that he was beginning to choke him and to relax his grip, which he did.

Shortly thereafter, his partner noticed that Officer Schock had released his grip and slipped beneath the water. Officer Schock's partner was unable to bring him back to the surface. A rescue diver reached their location soon after, brought Officer Schock to the surface, and began lifesaving efforts. As they got to shore, they continued CPR until EMS personnel arrived.

At this point, we believe the cause of the accident can be directly related to two failures on the part of the diving equipment Officer Schock was using at the time of the accident:

1. **A malfunctioning power inflator:** Due to age, wear, and lack of proper maintenance, the power inflator's deflator button broke off and fell in the water, along with its counter-pressure spring and spacer. As a result, the buoyancy compensator would not hold air.

The evidence suggests that this part failed after Officer Schock had been in the water and had surfaced at least one time.

2. **A malfunctioning weight release system:** It is believed that Officer Schock attempted to release his weight system by pulling on the ripcord and was unable to release his weights. This is supported by Officer Schock's statement to his partner after his partner told him to release his weights and he replied, "I can't." To further support this, Officer Schock made no attempt to release his weights, even when his partner told him repeatedly to do so throughout the ordeal.

As a result of the investigations, we will do the following:

1. Replace all current buoyancy compensators and weight release systems with new equipment.
2. Investigate and select a new weight release system that works with the buoyancy system.
3. Enhance the existing equipment maintenance, storage, and service program contained in the USART's Standard Operating Procedures.
4. Incorporate a formalized "Buddy Check" of all equipment worn by a diver prior to any diver getting into the water.
5. Require the use of a boat with flotation devices readily available when conducting dive operations in large bodies of water or navigable waterways.
6. When operating in deep water or conducting high-risk dive operations, have Emergency Medical Services personnel on scene.

While the dive team members are highly trained in underwater search and recovery, the very nature of this type of work requires continuous updating of knowledge, skills, equipment, and practices to which I am committed.

Attachments



Weight Release Cord Weave



Ripcord Handle



Power Inflator